



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

The making of a transnational historian: Patrick Harries in Lausanne

Morier-Genoud, E. (2015). The making of a transnational historian: Patrick Harries in Lausanne. In V. Arlt, S. Bishop, & P. Schmid (Eds.), *Explorations in African history: reading Patrick Harries* (pp. 11-14). Basler Afrika Bibliographien. <https://baslerafrika.ch/en/publishing-house/publications-shop/products/explorations-in-african-history/>

Published in:

Explorations in African history: reading Patrick Harries

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

Publisher rights

©2015 Authors

© 2015 Basler Afrika Bibliographien

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Queen's University Belfast Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The Research Portal is Queen's institutional repository that provides access to Queen's research output. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact openaccess@qub.ac.uk.

The Making of a Transnational Historian: Patrick Harries in Lausanne

Patrick Harries spent a year in Switzerland in 1991–1992. This constitutes a short and little-known episode in his long career. It is an important moment however, because it marked a turning point in Patrick's intellectual trajectory. This is when and where Patrick operated a shift from social history to cultural history and from an Africanist standpoint to a more connected historical approach. Said differently, Lausanne 1991–92 is a turning point in Patrick becoming a transnational historian of culture along the lines later formalised by Fred Cooper and Ann Stoler in their volume *Tensions of Empire*.¹

Patrick came to Switzerland in 1991 as a visiting professor at the University of Lausanne. He was invited to substitute professor François Jequier, an economic historian specialised in the question of watch manufacturing in Switzerland, who was going on sabbatical. Patrick taught two modules in Lausanne lasting the whole academic year (as it used to be in those pre-Bologna days), namely a seminar on South African history ('L'Afrique du Sud: un pays divisé') and an ex-cathedra course on Europeans' views of the African continent ('Une histoire culturelle de l'Afrique'). As part of these courses, Patrick invited David Birmingham to give a lecture about the history of Angola and Alpheus Manghezi to present the method of oral history as he practised it in Mozambique.

I was a student at the University of Lausanne in 1991 doing a BA in political science. Due to my interest in Africa, I sat in the two modules which Patrick offered and thus experienced his unique teaching approach and motivation. Drawing on the British tradition, Patrick demanded that we not only make presentations, but also run the seminar discussions. At the first session, he explained that the aim was not just to acquire new information, but also to acquire a capacity to make arguments and defend our own point of view—that is, to develop a sense of critique and improve our debating skills. Outside the classroom, Patrick was very approachable and he held regular office hours, something which was unusual in Lausanne; students thus met and talked to him at length about their essays, their studies and their futures.

In Lausanne, Patrick assembled around him a group of students and teaching assistants who had an interest in Africa, and he encouraged them to do original research in missionary archives (of the Mission Romande and the Philafrican Mission). With Patrick's support, and under the direction of Klauspeter Blaser, a professor of theology with teaching experience in South Africa (at the Federal Theological Seminary in Alice), these students went on to launch the publication

Le Fait Missionnaire (LFM) which, from being an irregular publication in 1995, grew to become the peer-reviewed journal *Social Sciences and Missions*.² In its first years, LFM published several revised BA Hons and MA theses, four of which were from students close to Patrick in Lausanne: Nicolas Monnier, Didier Péclard, Martina Egli, and the author of this text.

Patrick had been to Switzerland before 1991. His first visit had taken place seven years earlier, in 1984–1985, when he came as a post-doctoral fellow to work in the archives of the Mission Romande (housed in the *Département missionnaire des églises de la Suisse Romande*). These archives held rich material about the Tsonga/Shangaan people who lived in South Africa and Mozambique and who Patrick studied. During his time in Lausanne, Patrick took an intensive course in French at the University of Fribourg and thus drastically improved the little French he had learned earlier during a short visit to France before studying for his BA in Cape Town. While in Lausanne in 1985–86 Patrick also took part in the activities of the Vaudois branch of the Swiss Anti-Apartheid Movement (MAA). It was at an MAA meeting in 1985 that he met his wife Isabelle Vauthier who was to decisively shape his understanding of Swiss culture and Swiss Romande history.

In 1991–92 Patrick had not yet published his great work of social history *Work, Culture and Identity*.³ Yet he was already shifting to cultural history and to a more connected historical approach. Patrick's courses at the University of Lausanne illustrate this: one module was about Africa, looking at South Africa from an African perspective, while the other module looked at the European views of Africa, unpacking the long history of the European understandings of the "dark continent" (focusing on the idea of race, the theory and practice of museums, etc.). Similarly Patrick's research in the archives was no longer just concerned with Africans but also with Switzerland and Swiss missionaries, not least the famous Henri Alexandre Junod. This new interest in Swiss history led Patrick to delve into his father-in-law's private library. Isabelle's father (son and grandson of Free Church pastors and Vaudois patriots) had indeed kept the family's rich library where Patrick read Swiss Francophone classics such as Eugène Rambert and Henri Vuilleumier.

Patrick's stay in Lausanne took place in a singular historical context. Switzerland in 1991–92 was embroiled in a profound identity crisis. The Berlin wall had collapsed and Swiss citizens had just discovered that a third of the population had been spied on for decades by a federal police who looked suspiciously at anyone not opposed to communism. The government had secretly bought property abroad so as to flee should the country be invaded, and it had set up a secret parallel structure within the army (known as P-26) to bypass formal (and democratic) authority lines. A vivid debate was also under way about the nature of Switzerland's neutrality during the Second World War. These discoveries and debates shattered many myths and led Swiss citizens to question themselves and search for a new way to look at their history and identity. Patrick lived through this period intensively, reading the literary production of the moment and debating the situation with colleagues, friends and students. This influenced his think-

ing and his own work on identity, whether Swiss or African—see for example his 1998 article ‘Missionary Endeavour and the Politics of Identity in Switzerland’.⁴

Patrick has continued to visit Lausanne after 1992 to do research, to visit his in-laws and his daughter who did her BA at the University of Lausanne, and to see friends. Isabelle says Patrick has become very fond of Lausanne, loving the city for its quietness, its views, and its old town—presumably in addition to of its archives and university. The big question, to my mind, is whether Lausanne was just a (nice) place (like any other) where Patrick happened to operate a major intellectual shift or whether Lausanne actually shaped this scholar’s transformation? Indeed what was the influence of Isabelle, of Patrick’s in-laws, and of Lausanne’s academia on Patrick intellectual transformation? I cannot reasonably answer this question here, except to say that there has been some influence—probably more than we realise. Whatever the extent, what can and should be said more firmly is that the outcome of Patrick’s personal Swiss-South African encounter has enriched the Swiss and South African historiographies, the transnational historical approach, and Patrick’s many friends, colleagues and students.

1 Fred Cooper and Ann Stoler, eds. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

2 *Social Sciences and Missions* (Leiden: Brill), www.brill.nl/ssm.

3 Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, C. 1860–1910* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

4 Patrick Harries, ‘Missionary Endeavour and the Politics of Identity in Switzerland’, *Le Fait Missionnaire*, 6 (1988): 39–69.